When should I seek advice / help?

If your child complains of on-going foot, ankle or leg pains, or if you are concerned about anything you should seek advice by contacting your local podiatry clinic.

Stiff flat feet are often painful and usually need treatment.

What treatment will be required?

Most children with painless flexible flat feet do not need shoe inserts (orthoses).

Orthoses are only used in children with flexible flat feet when they are severe or there is pain.

Orthoses (insoles) are not able to change the shape of the foot in the long term. They are designed to hold the foot in a better position so that it can work more efficiently.

This in turn can help relieve any symptoms associated with the flat foot and may help prevent progressive deformity occurring.

Rigid flat feet are virtually always treated with orthoses. Sometimes there may also be the need for further investigations, such as exercises or surgery.

Orthotics can be a short or long term solution, your Podiatrist will monitor and advise accordingly. If you have any concerns or queries please consult your Podiatrist.

Comments, concerns or complaints?

If you have any comments, concerns or complaints and would like to speak to somebody about them please telephone:

01773 525119

Are we accessible to you?

This publication is available on request in other formats (for example, large print, easy read, Braille or audio version) and languages. For free translation and / or other format please telephone:

01773 824171 ext. 5587, or email us at: communications@dchs.nhs.uk


Cappello, T. and Song, K. (1998); Determining Treatment of Flat Feet in Children; Current Opinion in Pediatrics; Vol 10, 77-81
Flat Feet

What are flat feet?

At first, most babies’ feet look flat because an arch has not formed yet.

Usually the arch begins to appear by the time the child is 2 or 3 years old. In flat feet the arch does not appear to have formed.

The appearance of flat feet can be a normal part of development.

The typical flat foot is flexible and most children have no symptoms.

Nearly all children with flat feet have flexible flat feet. Flexible means the foot is flat on standing, but the arch returns when not standing (non-weight bearing).

What causes flat feet?

There are a number of causes of flat feet:

1. Often children with flat feet have hypermobility of other joints, such as knees and elbows. This is known as ligamentous laxity. Children with ligamentous laxity are often called “double jointed” e.g. they can rest their thumb on the forearm without discomfort - something that most of us cannot do.

2. Flexible flat feet can also occur where there is poor alignment between the front of the foot and the back of the foot or when there are tight muscles, this can happen at times of growth.

3. Flat feet can occur when there are more severe problems with the bones within the foot. These feet tend to be more rigid and the bones are often joined together or very badly aligned. In this case, the bones cannot move and the foot can be painful.

A rigid flat foot is always stiff and flat, whether standing on the foot or not, rigid flat feet rarely occur.

Simple Test

This is the tip toe test which tests the presence of an arch.

Have your child stand on their toes and watch for the arch to appear.

If an arch is not present, your child may have more of a severe flat foot type and you should seek advice from a HPC Registered Podiatrist.

What problems will occur?

In the past flat feet were thought to cause a lot of foot problems. In fact, the army would not accept soldiers with flat feet! In the last 30 years it is now thought that most people with flexible flat feet have no more foot problems than others.